The Pen Project – Spring 2025
Cycle # 1
053 – Eric – ‘Untitled’
Feedback by Jesse

Untitled

I must tell you this shit aint cool
I must tell you my friend How this can end.
6ft under or in the pen
They House us like a Bunch of Hens
We dont lay eggs But they still get paid
I Just Hope that these memories will fade
For at Night I do cry out loud I will not lie
I miss the life I left behind.
Out on the streets on the Grind
Look in my Eyes and you will Find
The Sadness of a Man who has lost his mind.

Hello Eric,

Thank you for submitting this piece to the Pen Project. I appreciate you taking the time to write this poem and attempt to express yourself or clear your head, as you said. I understand sharing your writing with anyone is vulnerable, so I want to encourage you to continue writing. This is an excellent first piece with many avenues to build from! You checked off five specific areas you'd like me to look at within this poem, so I will do my best to cover each one. First, however, I wanted to congratulate you for incorporating a rhyme scheme into a majority of your poem, as that can be (and is, in this case) a powerful way to guide your reader deeper into a poem's emotional setting.

For the first area, focus and general clarity, I do not think a reader will be confused by this poem or its intended message. The picture you paint in this poem is evocative while restricting yourself to only eleven lines. If you feel as though you would like to build upon this poem, whether that be a second stanza/paragraph or continue this thought in another poem, I would highly recommend doing so. There are two endings you see yourself coming to: death or life in prison. Through this, you reflect on your mistreatment in prison and the grief that fills you with your life out there and the life you are currently living.

Personally, I do not see many issues regarding organization/formatting because each of your lines adds up nicely and complements one another. However, I would like to comment on your rhyming scheme. The first two lines do not rhyme, but after that, it goes A/A/B/B/C/C/D/D/D. I believe the most potent lines of your poem are the last three (and a potential title since you chose not to include one this time, which is completely fine, and I will assume it was intentional). I would like to suggest writing more lines in the middle to create a triple-line rhyme scheme and finding some way to have the first two lines rhyme.

Moving on to word choice, I am going to take it line by line so there's no confusion. "I must tell you this shit aint cool" The only word I would recommend changing is **cool** because the rest of your poem morphs into what is honestly a heartbreaking admission of yourself and your life, and **cool** detracts from the momentum you build in the rest of the piece. It's clear you're going for a critique of the prison system, so you could consider words like **justice or right**. "I must tell you my friend How this can end." No changes word-wise unless you decide to rhyme it with the first line. "6ft under or in the pen" I would recommend spelling out 6ft (Six feet) as it allows the reader to move through the meaning of it a bit slower. "The House us like a Bunch of Hens" No changes, but this is incredible imagery with your living conditions. "We don't lay eggs But they still get paid" Again, no changes, but your ability to continue this vivid simile that can be interpreted in several ways is phenomenal. For the rest of the poem, I suggest no changes unless you decide to add lines in the middle to have three lines that rhyme together instead of two.

As for sentence structure, I'm going to include grammar/punctuation/spelling in this since punctuation is needed here but not in a typical sentence way. Poetry lines can sometimes, and often do, work differently than sentences in a book. I would recommend a comma after the first line and include an apostrophe in **aint** as it is a contraction. "I must tell you this shit ain't cool," I don't think you would need to include a comma after "6ft under or in the pen" as it is a shorter line, and I did not feel a pause when reading lines 3-4. Remember, a comma can indicate a slight pause in a reader's reading, so if you'd like to include a slight pause for the reader, include a comma. It doesn't have to be relegated to the end of a line; it can also be in the middle of it. Line 5 I would suggest a period at the end as it reads as a prominent declaration to the reader. Along with this, dont should have an apostrophe as it is a contraction, and as I suggested earlier, you could include a comma in the middle to break up this line. The reason for doing so is because you have **but,** which is a conjunction; it is joining an independent clause with a dependent clause. "We don't lay eggs, but they still get paid." On line 8, you did a great job of recognizing a period needed to be there, so I would suggest including a comma on lines 6 or 7, maybe both, depending on how you wanted it to be read. Finally, lines 9-11 are, like I said, my favorite lines of this poem, so I would only suggest a comma in line 10 "Look in my Eyes, and you will find" since **and** is also a conjunction.

Overall, Eric, this is an impressive first draft that not only provides vulnerability to the reader but also allows them to glimpse into your life in prison with rich similes and a rhyming scheme that really comes into its own in the last three lines. It is concise in its formatting but provides ample opportunity to dissect your work and the emotions you decided to share. Some of these include grief, regret, lividness, bleakness, disbelief, and guilt. Going forward, I highly suggest you reflect on the emotions you were feeling when writing this poem and experiment with wordplay, the length of the poem, and how you're feeling when writing with new pieces! I believe you could create works that could touch the lives of many. I'm going to include a few poems that touch on some of the aspects I've mentioned in this feedback. I hope you enjoy them.

The first is "Nothing Gold Can Stay" by Robert Frost. I've included it to give you an example of a short poem like yours that follows a similar rhyme scheme.

**Nothing Gold Can Stay** by Robert Frost (from Poetryfoundation.org)

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,

So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

Next is “Caged Bird” by Maya Angelou, where I wanted to show you a longer poem that evokes a strong emotional response within the reader.

**Caged Bird** by Maya Angelou (from PoetryFoundation.org)

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill

of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

Finally, this piece is a section of Claudia Rankine's poetry collection *Citizen: An American Lyric*. It is titled "February 26, 2012 / In Memory of Trayvon Martin" and talks about the grief and regret of losing a loved one.

**February 26, 2012 / In Memory of Trayvon Martin** by Claudia Rankine (Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014.)

My brothers are notorious. They have not been to prison. They have been imprisoned. The prison is not a place you enter. It is no place. My brothers are notorious. They do regular things, like wait. On my birthday they say my name. They will never forget that we are named. What is that memory?

The days of our childhood together were steep steps into a collapsing mind. It looked like we rescued ourselves, were rescued. Then there are these days, each day of our adult lives. They will never forget our way through, these brothers, each brother, my brother, dear brother, my dearest brothers, dear heart—

Your hearts are broken. This is not a secret though there are secrets. And as yet I do not understand how my own sorrow has turned into my brothers' hearts. The hearts of my brothers are broken. If I knew another way to be, I would call up a brother, I would hear myself saying, my brother, dear brother, my dearest brothers, dear heart—

On the tip of a tongue one note following another is another path, another dawn where the pink sky is the bloodshot of struck, of sleepless, of sorry, of senseless, shush. Those years of and before me and my brothers, the years of passage, plantation, migration, of Jim Crow segregation, of poverty, inner cities, profiling, of one in three, two jobs, boy, hey boy, each a felony, accumulate into the hours inside our lives where we are all caught hanging, the rope inside us, the tree inside us, its roots our limbs, a throat sliced through and when we open our mouth to speak, blossoms, o blossoms, no place coming out, brother, dear brother, that kind of blue. The sky is the silence of brothers all the days leading up to my call.

If I called I'd say good-bye before I broke the good-bye. I say good-bye before anyone can hang up. Don't hang up. My brother hangs up though he is there. I keep talking. The talk keeps him there. The sky is blue, kind of blue. The day is hot. Is it cold? Are you cold? It does get cool. Is it cool? Are you cool?

My brother is completed by sky. The sky is his silence. Eventually, he says, it is raining. It is raining down. It was raining. It stopped raining. It is raining down. He won’t hang up. He’s there, he’s there but he’s hung up though he is there. Good-bye, I say. I break the good-bye. I say good-bye before anyone can hang up, don’t hang up. Wait with me. Wait with me though the waiting might be the call of good-byes.

Thank you once again for submitting this poem to the Pen Project. Please remember that as the original author of this piece, you retain full ownership of it and ultimately any editorial choices you make are up to you alone. Good luck with your future writing!

Best Regards,

Jesse

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